

To The Reader

Thank you for deciding to take this journey with me!

This collection of poetry, prose, and images is just that...a collection. It is intended to provide different perspectives on many different topics, but at the same time provide a cohesive experience for the reader. Over the last 10 years, I have made a 360 turnaround from just being alive, to living!

This collection represents many experiences that I've had in my life, but it also represents the experiences of others as I attempt to provide a path to acceptance of the past, transition to the present, and starting anew for a bright future. It is my hope that you will be able to relate to the poetry, prose and images in some way. Even though a certain poem or work of prose may not be your story, it may be your mother's story, or your sister's story, or your brother's story, or even your child or best friend's story.

Each chapter is composed to encourage reflection on a different topic and how it relates to your life or simply to the world today. Since I could never fit my works into a nice little "genre" box, each chapter also contains a photograph that tells a part of the story, many of which are from my *Natural Elements* photo collection as I fancy myself an amateur photographer. As I tell each story through poetry, the goal is to provide insight on how the photo relates to the poem and why I chose each photo for that particular chapter.

This work intentionally explores a variety of topics to stimulate your mind and your heart. Writing is the spice of life and this collection has something to which everyone can relate. Whether the topic is empowering women, finding that forever love after a failed relationship, looking through the lens of violence, paying tribute to the life of a musical legend, succeeding in life despite humble beginnings, or commentary on the political landscape of our country, my hope is that as the reader, you gain a different perspective on how poetry, prose and images can work together to tell a story.

I credit my friend and sorority sister, the amazing, awesomely talented, best-selling author, Angie Ransome Jones, for giving me the idea of combining my expressions of love into a single work! This collection is my truth. I encourage you to read it individually, or as a group and reflect on how you can use my experiences to help you in your life or maybe to help someone else.

When I was in that dark place trying to find my way out, my sister from another mother encouraged me to seek professional help because honestly I couldn't see my way through it on my own. So twice a month for twelve months, I had "*conversations from the white sofa*," with my therapist. My therapist helped me through those dark months, and she also helped me to develop tools that I could use going forward so that I would not fall back into those habits that led me to the dark place.

The end of each chapter contains questions that are designed to "start the conversation" in hopes that thinking things through critically and talking about difficult issues will help someone else the way it helped me. It is an incredible joy to be a blessing to others. I pray that you are blessed by my story.

So let's talk!